http://globalsistersreport.org/sites/globalsistersreport.org/files/styles/story_author/public/authors/IliaDelio_headshot.jpg?itok=KTOjkbpk**Politics, Teilhard, and the world's future**

by [Ilia Delio](http://globalsistersreport.org/node/2211)

The results of the recent U.S. presidential primaries are not only startling, but also a wake-up call to the reality that our political system no longer works.

It is not simply that the parties are internally divided; rather, our political system is worn out. The significant lead of two outsiders, Donald Trump on the Republican side and Democrat Bernie Sanders, seems to signal *prima facie* that the public is tired of established politics and wants new blood.

While the lure of new ideas is always attractive, there is, at the same time, a growing resistance to change. Several candidates have promised to "make America great again" or to "take back our country," as if the complexities of American society are due to globalization or immigration or simply letting too many foreigners into the country. These grand political slogans are like verbal bullets aimed at the "bad guys"; it is like having John Wayne in his big cowboy hat running for president.

What does the phrase "take back this country" mean? Where shall we go back to? The threat of building a "Mexican wall" or ousting Muslims from the country evokes a type of Aryan cleansing that, given our global history over the last century, is frightening. These candidates play on the fragile emotions of middle-class Americans who are fearful of losing jobs, dwindling financial security, racial violence, terrorism and nuclear war.

Whether playing the card of religious fears (heaven, hell, Satan and sin) or being a television personality prompted by cue cards, some leading candidates do not seem to know much about foreign policy or even national policy, for that matter. Yet they do agree that the country is heading in the wrong direction. Median wages have stagnated while incomes at the top have soared. Cultural fears are compounding economic ones, and fears of terrorism continue to add a menacing ingredient to the populist brew.

The rise of Trump and Sanders in the polls despite more qualified candidates symbolizes the paralysis we find ourselves in and the severity of our political situation. Strangely enough, I see a parallel between politics and religion. Both are constructed on old philosophical principles, and neither politics nor religion has kept abreast of modern science. I find this alarming.

If politics and religion are concerned with human life, and science gives us new insights on life — how we emerge, what we are made of — would it not make sense to renew the systems of politics and religion periodically based on the insights of science? After all, if scientific paradigms change as a result of new discoveries, why not the paradigms of religion and politics, as well?

The question raised by the presidential political turmoil is a metaphysical one. Is our mechanistic, hierarchical political system best suited to meet the needs of our changing country, which exists in a changing world? Our political structures have worked until now, but it is taking more and more energy to keep these structures alive or from the inevitable: a total collapse.

The person who saw clearly a way forward into a life-giving future in a world of change was the Jesuit scientist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. I do not know if any of the presidential candidates know the writings of Teilhard, but it would be worthwhile to send them Teilhard's book *Activation of Energy*, where the Jesuit outlined principles of human evolution in view of the modern world.

Teilhard did not have a narrow view of evolution based on Darwinian principles of natural selection or survival of the fittest; rather, for him, evolution is the dynamic process of emerging consciousness. It pertains to every level of life; it is a dimension of all aspects of life, including politics. On the most fundamental level, evolution reflects the fact that life changes, new things happen and, given a sufficient amount of time, new forms will appear; hence, there are no fixed forms. Rather, all systems of life are in the process of formation, and thus, openness to the environment is key to change. To live with an evolutionary spirit, Erich Jantsch once wrote, is to let go when the right time comes and to engage in new structures of relationship.

We live in an evolving, unfinished universe, which means the one thing we all share is the future. In Teilhard's view, we must co-create the future together. He saw that computer technology would be our most significant evolver in the modern age. The rise of the internet has given way to Google Earth; mass communication, air travel, space travel, and artificial intelligence have all rapidly altered the map of human consciousness in such a radical way that there is no turning back. According to Moore's law, which states that computing power is doubling every two years, evolution is speeding up. As a result, we are evolving at an exponential rate. Not only will we not return to any former halcyon days, but we are heading for greater convergence and complexification of consciousness, whether we want to or not. The question is not "Can we go back?" but "What are we evolving into?"

In his own day, Teilhard looked around the world and realized that the population cannot sustain unlimited growth. Nor can we continue to spread the human community around the globe; we have maxed out the available space on Earth to set up home. Now we face the brick wall of compression because we have a world of limited supplies.

Teilhard indicated that we must evolve by unifying or suffer the pain of annihilation. As he wrote in his *The Phenomenon of Man*: "The success of humanity's evolution will not be determined by 'survival of the fittest' but by our own capacity to converge and unify." He foresaw that something like the Internet could stimulate the next phase of evolution by linking humanity around the globe, mind to mind and heart to heart, if we use it for this aim. In some ways, it is already doing so. However, we cannot gather ourselves on this new level of mind — what he called the noosphere — unless we have political structures and public policies that support this new phase of global life.

The present political climate is zapping our energies and instilling a new level of fear, just the opposite of what Teilhard saw we needed: a zest for life and a grand option for the future. In his words: "A higher socialization of humankind can only be brought about if people have the will and energy to work for it, if they deeply believe in the positive value of the future." Otherwise, he said, we are a species doomed to extinction.

That is why, quite frankly, the slogan "take back our country" frightens me. We cannot return to Puritan America, where "Leave it to Beaver" modeled the ideal family who gathered on Sunday evening to watch "The Ed Sullivan Show." The days of American triumphalism are over. We are evolving into a new world community, a new consciousness of being America that includes religious and ethnic pluralism and a global economy; we are participants in a global community. We need political structures that realize a shared species on a shared Earth. We are not kings and queens ruling the world; we are part of an indivisible whole. The sooner we can develop new political structures that support the evolution of global humanity, the more zest for life we will have, a zest kindling new energy to create a more unified world.

***Editor's note*:** *This version clarifies that Teilhard de Chardin foresaw a connecting force like the Internet -- he died in 1955 before it came into widespread use.*

[Ilia Delio, a member of the Franciscan Sisters of Washington, D.C., is the Josephine C. Connelly Endowed Chair in Theology at Villanova University. She is the author of 16 books and the general editor of the series *Catholicity in an Evolving Universe*. Her newest book is *Making All Things New: Catholicity, Cosmology and Consciousness* (Orbis Books 2015).